

T H E C L E V E L A N D M U S E U M O F A R T

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PRESS PREVIEW: MONDAY
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10 a.m. to 12 noon

December 10, 1975

The first exhibition to fully survey the work of the 17th century Baroque painter Johann Liss opens December 17, 1975 at The Cleveland Museum of Art and will continue on view through March 7, 1976.

Over three years in preparation, the international loan show brings together almost all of the artist's known works -- 35 paintings and 15 etchings and drawings, among the latter a superb figure study discovered only in the last few months.

Liss, although German-born, spent most of his life in the Netherlands and Italy, dying in Venice in his early thirties. Absorbing influences from German, Dutch, Flemish and Italian sources, he developed a highly individual style which in its maturity anticipates Rococo art by more than 100 years, and according to Cleveland Museum Director Sherman E. Lee, "provides the crucial link between Venetian painting of the 16th and 18th centuries."

Many of Liss's works have been little known, however, even to scholars until very recently: some entered private collections soon after they were painted, and remained out of public view for centuries; others, in the course of time, were lost or acquired erroneous attributions.

It was only in the early part of this century, when there was a revival of interest in Baroque art, that the first serious study of the artist was undertaken. The discovery in recent decades of several previously unknown works by Liss has generated further inquiries into his artistic development.

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The results of this latest research are presented for the first time in the present exhibition organized jointly by the Cleveland Museum and the Städtische Kunstsammlungen in Augsburg, Germany. It is supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and is under the patronage of the International Council of Museums.

The exhibition was seen in Augsburg from August 2, 1975 until November 2. Among the viewers was a private collector who discovered that a previously unidentified drawing in his possession was actually a study for a figure in the Liss painting, the Fall of Phaeton. The drawing has been added for the Cleveland showing.

Liss is an intriguing figure. According to his biographer, Joachim von Sandrart, the artist was born in Oldenburg in the Holstein region of northern Germany around 1597, but left home -- probably in his teens -- to study in the Netherlands.

His early works in Haarlem and Amsterdam emulated the styles and themes of Dutch and German artists. In Antwerp, where he was exposed to the work of Rubens and Jacob Jordaens, he produced his first important painting of an entirely individual character, the large figure composition, Satyr and Peasant.

A rare signed drawing, Allegory of Christian Faith, documents his arrival in Rome. Here, he painted one of his largest and most remarkable works, the Banquet of Soldiers and Courtesans, showing the strong influence of Caravaggio and his followers.

It was probably during this Roman period that Liss also painted Amor Vincit, a work acquired by the Cleveland Museum in 1971. Some scholars have suggested that the painting, depicting a young man as Cupid, is a self-portrait of the artist.

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From about 1625 until his death of the plague in 1629, Liss worked in Venice. Here, inspired by the works of Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese, he developed a style that was far in advance of his contemporaries. The late paintings of this period -- the Ecstasy of St. Paul and Vision of St. Jerome -- exhibit a loose brushwork and luminosity of color which are echoed a century later in the radiant, buoyant paintings of the Rococo.

In the exhibition, paintings and graphic works by Liss have been arranged chronologically, enabling viewers to trace the extraordinary evolution that took place in the artist's style over the short span of 15 years. Since Liss, like many other artists of his time, repeated paintings to meet the demands of collectors, exhibition visitors also will have the rare opportunity to see duplicate versions of several paintings hanging side by side.

A small group of prints and drawings by artists who copied works by Liss is included in the exhibition as well. A special study section further illustrates -- with the aid of enlarged photographs and a selection of paintings and graphics -- the places and artists that affected Liss's development, the sources of his inspiration, and the influence of his work on other artists.

Approximately one-third of the works in the exhibition are from museums and private collections in Germany. Important loans are also coming from ten other European countries, the United States and Argentina. Liss's Vision of St. Jerome, a large altarpiece commissioned for the church of S. Nicolò da Tolentino in Venice, was loaned by permission of the Vatican.

All of the known works by Liss, including some paintings that proved too difficult to borrow for the exhibition, are illustrated in a scholarly catalog published in both German and English editions. Dr. Rüdiger Klessmann, Director of the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum in Braunschweig, Germany, contributes an essay on Liss's early years in the Netherlands and Rome; Ann Tzeutschler Lurie, Associate

Curator of Paintings at the Cleveland Museum, describes the artist's years in Venice; Louise S. Richards, Curator of Prints and Drawings at the Cleveland Museum, provides comments on the graphic works; and Dr. Bruno Bushart, Director of the Augsburg Städtische Kunstsammlungen, examines Liss's ties to German art. Dr. Rolf Biedermann, in charge of prints and drawings at the Augsburg museum, organized the study section for both the exhibition and the catalog.

The catalog contains approximately 200 text pages, 179 black and white illustrations, and 10 color plates. It is available in a softbound edition priced at \$8.00.

On the opening day of the exhibition, Wednesday, December 17, at 5:30 p.m. Dr. Rüdiger Klessmann will give a public lecture entitled "Liss Problems." Gallery talks are scheduled at 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, December 17, and Sunday, December 21.

The exhibition has been installed in the special exhibitions gallery on the Museum's ground floor. Admission is \$1.00 for adults and \$.50 for students. Museum members are admitted free.

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For additional information or photographs, please contact Ann Edwards or Frances Stamper, Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; (216) 421-7340.